

District Building
Southeast corner of 14th and E Streets, NW
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-314

HABS
D.C.
WASH,
256-

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPH

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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P H O T O G R A P H S

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

STATE District of Columbia	COUNTY	TOWN OR VICINITY Washington
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) District Building		HABS NO. DC-314
SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE		
COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES) Southeast corner of 14th and E Streets, NW		
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) 1904-1908	ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE) Cope and Stewardson, architects Adolph De Nesti designed statuary	
SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE) Has housed the municipal government of the District of Columbia, in its various forms, since the building's erection.		
STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE) Beaux Arts		
MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS) Marble on granite base		
SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE) 190' (9-bays) by 241' (13-bays); U-shaped above first floor; 5 stories; exposed basement and sub-basement; entrance end pavilions project slightly		
EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE Basement and first floor serve as a rusticated base for monumental Corinthian pilasters which separate bays on 2nd through 4th floors; windows on 5th floor flanked by heroic allegorical figures		
INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED) Marble stairway opposite main entrance; principal offices of panelled wood; large meeting room on 5th floor		
MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES		
PRESENT CONDITION AND USE Condition in 1970 good.		
OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE		
SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.) Schwartz, Nancy B. Historic American Buildings Survey District of Columbia Catalog, 1974. Tindall, William. "The District Building," Records of the Columbia Historical Society. Vol. 26, pp. 146-156. Listed on National Register of Historic Places.		
COMPILER, AFFILIATION Alison K. Hoagland, HABS (edited by Druscilla J. Null, HABS)		DATE 6/24/83

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Data for City Hall Project
Sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Mayors,
American Institute of Architects, and U.S.
Department of Interior American Building Survey

Name: The District Building.

Location: 1350 "E" Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001
South East Corner of 14th and "E" Street N.W.
and South of Pennsylvania Avenue.

Present Owner: Public/District of Columbia.

Present Occupant: Mayor and City Council as well as Administrative
officials & departments.

Present Use: Municipal Headquarters.

Significance: The Joint Committee on Landmarks has designated the
District Building a Category II Landmark of importance
which contributes significantly to the cultural heritage
of the District of Columbia. The building is an
excellent example of American Beaux Arts Classicism.

Before construction of the District Building, the square
had a variety of uses. A Baltimore stage line occupied
one corner of the tract prior to the establishment of
Nailor's stables in 1820's. In the 1850's a three story
brick shop used a bindery fronted on E Street. Immediate-
ly before the construction of the District Building, the
site housed a Capital Traction Company powerhouse. The
powerhouse was completely destroyed by fire in 1897.

The Public Building Act which became law in 1902 authoriz-
ed \$550,000 for purchase of the powerhouse site. The
same law also authorized construction of a building at a
cost not to exceed \$1,500,000. This amount was later
increased to \$2,000,000. Construction costs were increas-
ed by the need to drive approximately 2,400 piles into
the marshy ground to support the building since it was
located on the bed of the Tiber River.

In 1944 the main corridor of the new building was lined
with 200 cots for visiting servicemen.

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Part I. Historical Information

1. Date of Erection:

The building was constructed from 1904 - 1908. The building was dedicated with much ceremony on July 4, 1908, with the Honorable Henry MacFarland, the President of the Commissioners, presiding.

2. Architect:

The commission for the design of the building was awarded to the Philadelphia firm of Cope and Stewardson as a result of design competition. The design of the building called for a "Classic" design in the manner of the English Renaissance". The firm of Cope and Stewardson, a well known East Coast firm had previously designed buildings for Bryn Mawr College, Princeton University, and the Lady Chapel of St. Mark's Church in Philadelphia. Neither principal of the firm was alive at the time of the construction of the building. John Stewardson drowned in 1896, and Walter Cope died in 1902. The statuary on the exterior of the building was designed by De Nesti and Ernest C. Bairstow.

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

Since the District Government did not require public buildings to have permits at the time of construction of the District Building, this information is unavailable.

4. Original plans and construction:

The District Building was constructed under the supervision of a special commission composed of the Secretary of Treasury and the Commissioners of the District of Columbia. However, information on original plans and construction is unavailable.

5. Alterations and additions:

The original site has not been altered, however, several interior alterations have been made over the years since its construction.

Part II. Architectural Information:

A. Description of Exterior:

The District Building is an excellent example of American Beaux Arts Classicism. The base of the building is of grey granite from Blue Hill, Maine; the upper stories are of white marble from South Dover, New York. The building is approximately 241 feet wide (13 bays) and 190 feet deep (9 bays). Above the first story, the building opens into a light court on the south or rear elevation, and thus takes a U-shaped form. Of wall-bearing construction, the building is 5 stories high plus basement and sub-basement.

The principal or north entrance facade is symmetrically designed with a great central portal and two slightly projecting end pavilions. The ground story is of smooth granite block with rectangular inset windows separated from the first story by a belt course which continues around the building. The first story is of chamfered rusticated courses with rectangular fenestration; the windows have square, keystone lintels.

Located in the center of the north facade, the main entrance portal which is flush with the main facade is approached by a series of steps. This monumental portal is flanked by plain round pilasters and contains an entablature supported by heavy oversized brackets. Over the portal is the inscription MCMIV-- the date construction began on the building. The entablature supports a balcony whose balustrade contains a cartouche surmounted by an eagle with spreading wings and flanked on either side by reclining figures representing respectively, "Justice" and "Law". From the main portal, another series of steps lead up through a vestibule to the two-leaf entrance door which opens onto the main floor.

The second, third and fourth stories are treated as one unit and are tied together through the use of Corinthian pilasters set on pedestals supported by a belt course. The Corinthian pilasters are capped by a full entablature with swag decoration in or frieze which terminates with a denticulated, projecting cornice. The end pavilions contain pilasters enclosed by heavy square piers which terminate at the cornice line and do not have capitals.

The fenestration of the second, third, and fourth stories are similar. Each bay (with the exception of the placement of narrow rectangular windows before the end pavilions and the center bay) contains one wide rectangular window separated by

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stone mullions from flanking narrow side windows. The center window in each bay in the second story contains brackets supporting a triangular pediment. The second story bay window in each pavilion also has a balcony supported by brackets. On the third story, the pediment over the center window is round, and, on the fourth, there is only a square lintel with a keystone over the center window of the bay.

The fifth or attic story contains very plain fenestration combined with rather elaborate ornamentation. Located on the recessed section of the main facade on either side of the center bay are heroic sculpted figures depicting (from east to west): Sculpture (male) Painting (female), Architecture (male), Music (female), Commerce (female), Engineering (male), Agriculture (female) and Statesmanship (male). The fenestration and the statuary continues on both the sides and the rear facade of the building.

The rear facade contains two end pavilions 3 bays wide connected at the first story level. The first story of this connecting section is terminated by a parapet containing a large cartouche in the center. The building above the first story forms a U-shaped light court with walls articulated in a manner similar to the remainder of the building. This rear facade opens onto the Grand Plaza of the Federal Triangle.

B. Description of Interior:

The interior of the first floor contains a grand marble stairway located opposite the main entrance. The walls have marble stairway located opposite the main entrance. The walls have marble wainscoting and the interior still contains such classical motifs as broken pediments over the interior doors. The fifth floor was originally designed to house the three Commissioners who governed the city of Washington. These pine-paneled offices are located at the northeast, northwest, and southeast corners of the building, and are now occupied by the offices of the Mayor and the City Administrator. The "Boardroom" with its elliptical vaulted ceiling is now used as the Council Chamber. The interior of the vestibule is elaborately decorated with classical motifs.

C. Site:

The building occupies the entire block between E and D Streets, 13½ and 14th Streets, south of Pennsylvania Avenue. The building is also located in the midst of the Pennsylvania Avenue Development. The White House is located on the north end of Pennsylvania Avenue and the Capitol on the south end.

Part III. Sources of Information:

1. National Register of Historic Places
2. Martin Luther King Library, Washington Section
3. National Archives of the United States (Minutes of District of Columbia Commissioners Meetings - Mrs. Dorthy Provine)
4. District of Columbia Historic Preservation Officer

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